

Expressive Element

An element that can be manipulated by a performer to create a chosen expressive outcome.

The expressive elements of music are those that can be manipulated or adjusted by the performer to create a particular expressive outcome, character, atmosphere or mood. For example, consider the dynamic markings commonly used in notated music: *pp*, *p*, *mp*, *mf*, *f* and *ff*. A performer might have up to ten different versions of the markings, and choose to use them to create a particular expressive outcome.

Which elements of music are expressive?

The elements that are commonly considered expressive include tempo, dynamics, articulation, tone colour, balance of music lines, blend of instrumental voices, phrasing, ornamentation, embellishment and improvisation.

The elements of music not included in this list can also be expressive, depending on the style of music being played. For example, in Western Art music it is usual for the performer to play the music on the score, as it has been composed. This usually includes the duration, pitch, structure and texture. Therefore, a performer can only manipulate those elements not controlled by the composer.

Alternatively, in a jazz performance any of the elements of music can be manipulated by the performer and therefore even usually composed elements of music (such as rhythm and melody) can become expressive.

Without seeing the score belonging to the music being played, we cannot know which elements of the music have been dictated to the performer via the musical score and which are being created or manipulated by the performer.

Duration

The length of time that something (a sound, in music) lasts for.

Beat

The basic, regular unit of time, the steady underlying "heartbeat" of the music.

Rhythm

The pattern of sounds, organised according to duration, heard over the underlying beat/pulse structure.

Metre

The organisation of rhythm into bars, usually comprising stressed and unstressed beats/pulses.

Tempo

The speed (usually of the beat/pulse) at which music is played.

An expressive element.

